Endings/W05

Reading and Writing Assignment for Friday, Jan. 21: The Mosaic Covenant

Reading:
Exodus 3.1 to 4.26.; 9.1 to 10.2; 13.17 to 15.22; 19.1 to 20.26; 31.18 to 34.35.
Harris, 129-143 discusses Exodus. Obviously, not all of this section deals with the aspects of Exodus we are concerned with. For instance, we are skipping Moses’s birth and childhood. You could start Harris at pg. 134 and decide for yourself what you want to read about.

Writing:
Most of these questions have very quick answers. I will be collecting these. Like Tracy (I’ll try it!), I will accept group answers, but they have to be ready to hand in on Friday.

1. The footnote to 3.1-6 tells us that it describes a theophany. What is this?
2. What characteristic of a scientist does Moses demonstrate at 3.3?
3. Note what Harris says about this theophany: that in it, God announces “for the first time [his plan] to intervene on the world stage of national politics” on behalf of his people.
4. At 3.15, God refers to himself as “the LORD.” Follow the superscript b to the bottom of the column to learn what “LORD” stands for when written in capitals. Read also the actual footnote to this verse.
5. What does YHWH promise the Israelites at the end of 3.22?
6. At 4.21 we learn that, when Moses goes to Pharoah to ask for his people’s freedom, Pharoah will refuse because his heart will be hardened. By whom will it be hardened?
7. At 4.22, how is Moses instructed to describe Israel to Pharoah? The footnote tells you this is of major importance. (It also becomes very important to later Christian readings of the Hebrew Bible.) Read the footnotes.
8. Did you realize YHWH tries to kill Moses once – at 4.24? Enjoy the weirdness and mysteriousness of 4.24-26. Don’t spend too much time trying to figure it out. No relevance to our course. But it’s interesting to learn from the footnotes what Moses’s “feet” were.
9. What does 4.31 tell you about the Israelites relation to YHWH up to now? Have they been worshipping him?
10. In 9.1 to 10.2, find at least two places where YHWH explains his ultimate aim in his dealings with Pharoah. What is this aim?
11. In 13.17 to 15.22, what do we learn about the Israelites’ behavior?
12. At 14.15-18 – again – what is YHWH after?
13. In ch. 19, we get the second theophany. At 19.1-6, YHWH offers the Israelites a covenant. What is promised them? On what condition? The distinction is made between monolatry – the worship of one god while conceding the existence of others – and monotheism, the assertion that there is only one god. It is usually said that at this point of the Hebrew Bible the Israelites are learning monolatry. Are there any hints of monotheism in 19.1-6?
14. At 20.1, we get the beginning of the Decalogue. In class, I distinguished between ritual laws, those involving the “vertical” transaction between humans and God,
and *ethical* laws, those involving the “horizontal” transaction between humans and humans. Which of the commandments are ritual? Which ethical?

15. Ch. 32 contains one of the great episodes in Exodus – the Golden Calf. Be sure to read the footnotes. Some questions: (a) What main argument does Moses use to dissuade YHWH from destroying the Israelites in his wrath? (b) Having calmed YHWH down, how does Moses then behave? (This is so wonderfully human.) (c) At 32.25 ff., how does Moses require that the Levites show their special loyalty to YHWH? (d) At 33.14-16, what does Moses say will be the effect of the Israelites’ having YHWH’s presence with them? (e) At 33.19, YHWH seems to give another explanation of his name. (See footnote to Exodus 3.15.) What does he explain it as meaning?